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ABSTRACT

This conference presentation describes how Virginia Wesleyan College's (VWC) arbitration process, in conjunction with the ideas contained in Ernest Boyer's special report, "Campus Life: In Search of Community", enhances the concept of community at VWC. The paper opens with a brief profile of VWC, a 1,400 student liberal arts school associated with the United Methodist Church, and then discusses the history of the VWC arbitration model. VWC's arbitration project arose from the concept of living and learning. This connection between the classroom and the dorm is also found in Boyer's report which is summarized, paying special attention to three of Boyer's six principles for day-to-day decision making (Just, Disciplined, Caring), and how these relate specifically to VWC and its community arbitration system. Supporting materials include handouts providing terms and definitions for VWC's community arbitration along with an arbitration flowchart. The paper concludes that VWC's model works well in being sensitive to the "Boyer" principles by incorporating mediation, personal responsibility and a well-defined governance program. (RJM)

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Freedom and Responsibility

March 23, 1993
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Salon I

In The Spirit of Community: Student Centered Discipline

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NASPA 1993

"In the Spirit of Community: Student Centered Discipline"
D. Buckingham and J. VanHecke, presenters

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I. Introduction

In the July 29, 1992 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education, Gary Pavela's article entitled "Today's College Students Need Both Freedom and Structure" emphasized the importance for additional supervision of students. Pavela suggested that there was and is a need for "a more comprehensive program that clarifies responsibilities, provides collaboration with students, sets clear standards for behavior and furnishes role models and education."

Virginia Wesleyan's arbitration process is one way to meet the suggestions outlined by Pavela. Through mediation and student involvement, the arbitration process enhances the concept of community. Together, student responsibility and the framework of Boyer's "Campus Life: In Search of Community" will serve as focal points for our discussion this morning.

II. Biography of Virginia Wesleyan College

Born in an age of complexity and rapid change, Virginia Wesleyan College was charted in 1961, and opened in 1966. Virginia Wesleyan is a liberal arts college related to the United Methodist Church. Located astride the Virginia Beach/Norfolk city lines, the College's student numbers approximately 1400 with a first year class of 300 students. There are approximately 600 students living in residence. The College campus is patterned closely after Thomas Jefferson's adaptation of the Oxford-Cambridge plan. Residence Halls are designed to foster a sense of community though physical structure which draws together faculty, staff and students based on proximity and the inter-connectedness of classrooms, faculty offices, student living spaces, and common areas utilized for academic and co-curricular programming. At Virginia Wesleyan, we call it an Academic Village and these structures are made up of seven buildings (four residence halls, 2 class rooms, faculty offices and a large commons area for multipurpose uses. Currently, we have two Villages with a third structure under construction due for completion in the Fall of '93. Additionally there are traditional classroom buildings on campus.

Finally, the program of the College, in all its facets, is set within a tradition that emphasizes excellence and freedom - academic and personal - coupled with responsibility and self-discipline.

III. Historical Perspective of Arbitration

In the fall of 1971, a subcommittee appointed by the Student Activities Welfare Committee (SAWC) was asked to study student life. The committee consisted of three faculty, three students, and the Dean of Students. Dr. Harvey Simpson, a physicist, chaired the committee. The subcommittee was charged to study various aspects of student life with particular emphasis on the problems and needs of the resident student. To investigate these issues, the subcommittee conducted several meetings in the residence halls; speaking with resident students and their proctors.

Additionally, a number of conversations took place with commuter students and faculty members and administrators.

Several observations came forward: one, there was considerable concern about the protection of individual student rights and the lack of community, two, there was also significant concern about disturbances within the residence halls which were seriously impairing the rights of students to study and affecting issues of individual privacy, and three, the committee found that the conventional judicial system was not working.

Students were not following the formal protocol set forth by the judicial system, and, accordingly, offensive behavior was not being resolved. Conversely, numbers of students were very frustrated by the lack of any structure in their living environment.

As a result of the committee's work, it was recommended that the

judicial system be discarded and that an arbitration system be put in place modeled after a labor management mediation setting. It was believed that this process would enable students to work out compromises and give students a chance to solve their own problems and help them develop some ownership and ultimately, establish a sense of community.

The arbitration process was designed so that if at the first level of discussion a solution could not be found, the matter could then be referred on to the next level of mediation for resolution... However, if an impasse developed at this second stage, a final referral could be made to the third level of mediation where binding arbitration could or would take place and where faculty and administrators would get involved.

The arbitration model supported the living and learning concept or village thesis of living and learning. This same "connection" between the classroom and the dorm that was identified and established in 1971 at Virginia Wesleyan College is again found in Ernest Boyer's special report entitled Campus Life: In Search of Community.

As so stated in chapter five, and I quote, "in a caring community, students make a connection between what they learn and live. The goal of educators should be to help students see that they are not only autonomous individuals but also members of a larger community to which they are accountable." (Boyer 54)

IV. Boyer Report Reviewed

The special report Campus Life: In Search of Community was a collaborative effort entailing several campus visits across the country, numerous surveys of various campus constituencies and countless interviews. By way of the foreword, Boyer reflects on of higher education over the past four decades.

Speaking first of the unrestrained optimism of the 50's, the turbulence of the 60's (notwithstanding the discourse by some students about the notion of a learning community), the ambiguity and pre-occupation by students about their credentials in the 70's, and the mixed confidence and caution of the 80's.

The present decade has taken still another focus. There is more talk about curriculum, teaching, and the quality of campus life. One reason offered for this new focus on campus renewal, Boyer contends, is motivated by concerns about the darker side of campus life.

There is, in Boyer's opinion, confusion about campus governance, pointing to the increased incidents of incivility and sexual and racial harassment. Issues that obviously can not be ignored and, therefore it is our responsibility as Student Personnel Professionals to begin imagining, creating, building or strengthening our campus communities.

In doing so, Boyer goes on to say that it is very important that there be clarity of the both academic and civil standards. They need to be defined

with some precision so that these values or standards will undergird our communities of learning. There needs to be a sense of renewal to make college campuses truly a vital place -- intellectually and socially.

In light of concerns verbalized by College and University leaders across the country, the Boyer Report suggests that, "What is needed is a larger more integrative vision of community in higher education, one that focuses not on the length of time students spend on campus, but on the quality of their encounter as it relates not only to social activities, but to classroom, too." The goal is to clarify both academic and civil standards, and above all, to define with some precision the enduring values of a community of learning.

In response to this challenge, the Boyer Report proposes six principles that provide an effective formula for day-to-day decision-making. Taken together these six principles define the kind of community every college and university should strive to be.

Terms for the Flip Chart

1. Purposeful

-- shared goals

-- strengthened learning

2. Open

-- freedom protected

-- civility affirmed

3. Just

-- honored persons

-- diversity pursued

4. Disciplined

-- responsibilities accepted

-- well defined guidelines

5. Caring

-- members supported

-- service to others encouraged

6. Celebrative

--heritage remembered

-- traditions shared

-- change encouraged

V. Overview of the Boyer Report Principles

. Highlighted from "Campus Life: In Search of Community:"

First, a college or university is an educationally purposeful community, a place where faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus. Purposefulness comes first because it is fundamental to all others. At institutions of higher education, teaching and learning can not be divided, they are central functions. If faculty, staff and students do not join together in common quest, then talk about strengthening the community is just that ... talk.

Second, a college or university is an open community, a place freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed. The educational missions of our institutions are carried out through reasoned discourse. The free expression of ideas in a community is essential and the integrity of all communication must be affirmed if both scholarship and civility are to flourish.

Third, a college or university is a just community, a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued. Higher learning builds community out of the rich resources of its members. It should reject prejudicial judgement, celebrate (not just tolerate) diversity and seek to serve the full range of citizens in our society effectively.

Fourth, a college or university is a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behaviors for the common good. Disciplined communities convey powerful messages about how honesty and integrity form the foundation for learning. Now don't misunderstand, The goal is not to have unenforceable commandments but rather it is to assure that all parts of college life are governed by high standards.

Fifth, a college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where services to others are encouraged. While colleges should be purposeful, just, disciplined and open, the unique characteristic that makes these objectives work, the glue that holds it all together, is the way people relate to one another. Caring is the key.

Finally, sixth, a college or university is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared. If community is important (and most campus leaders would agree that it is), college should sustain a keen sense of their own heritage and traditions. Whether the institution is 27 years old or 127 years old, rituals, rites and ceremonies can create a sense of belonging in a legacy of those who have gone before among students.

The Boyer Report recognizes that these principles have, to some degree, informed decision-making in higher education throughout the years. The purpose of the report is to urge that the six principles be adopted more formally as a campus compact and be used more consistently as the basis for day-to-day decision making on the campus.

This morning, we'll focus on three of the six principles - just, disciplined and caring, the three we feel more directly relate to our community arbitration system.

VI. Mechanics of Community Arbitration

SEE HAND OUTS

VIRGINIA WESLEYAN COLLEGE
COMMUNITY ARBITRATION
TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Arbitration Process: A system of four levels governed by the rules of due process which was created to mediate, discuss and resolve alleged infractions of college policy, unsatisfactory student conduct or general grievances and complaints.

Community Arbitration Board: A three member board consisting of the Dean of Students, an appointed faculty member and the President of the Student Government Association, the Community Arbitration Board (CAB) convenes to hear matters which the other levels do not resolve. The major distinction between this level of discussion and those proceeding is that the CAB will develop its own decisions which will be binding on the parties concerned. The CAB has the authority to impose sanctions and is subject to review by the Community Review Board (CRB).

Community Relations Council: Consisting of three student members (at least one male, one female and one commuter student), the Community Relations Council (CRC) attempts to bring about a mutually agreeable solution. It hears concerns involving cross-campus conflict, as well as conflict not resolved at the proceeding levels.

Community Review Board: Two full-time teaching faculty, one resident student and one commuter student make up the Community Review Board (CRB). The board automatically reviews the procedures and conclusions of the CAB in each instance where the latter body has issued a decision concerning a matter brought to it for negotiation. The prime concern of this review will be to determine whether or not the CAB conducted a reasonably fair and rational hearing and to evaluate the imposed decision as being in the best interests of the parties involved and the community welfare. The CRB will affirm the actions of the CAB or direct it to rehear the matter under consideration.

Referrals and Recommendations: In addition to imposing disciplinary sanctions, students may be referred to on campus services or other appropriate recommendations, requests or referrals may be made.

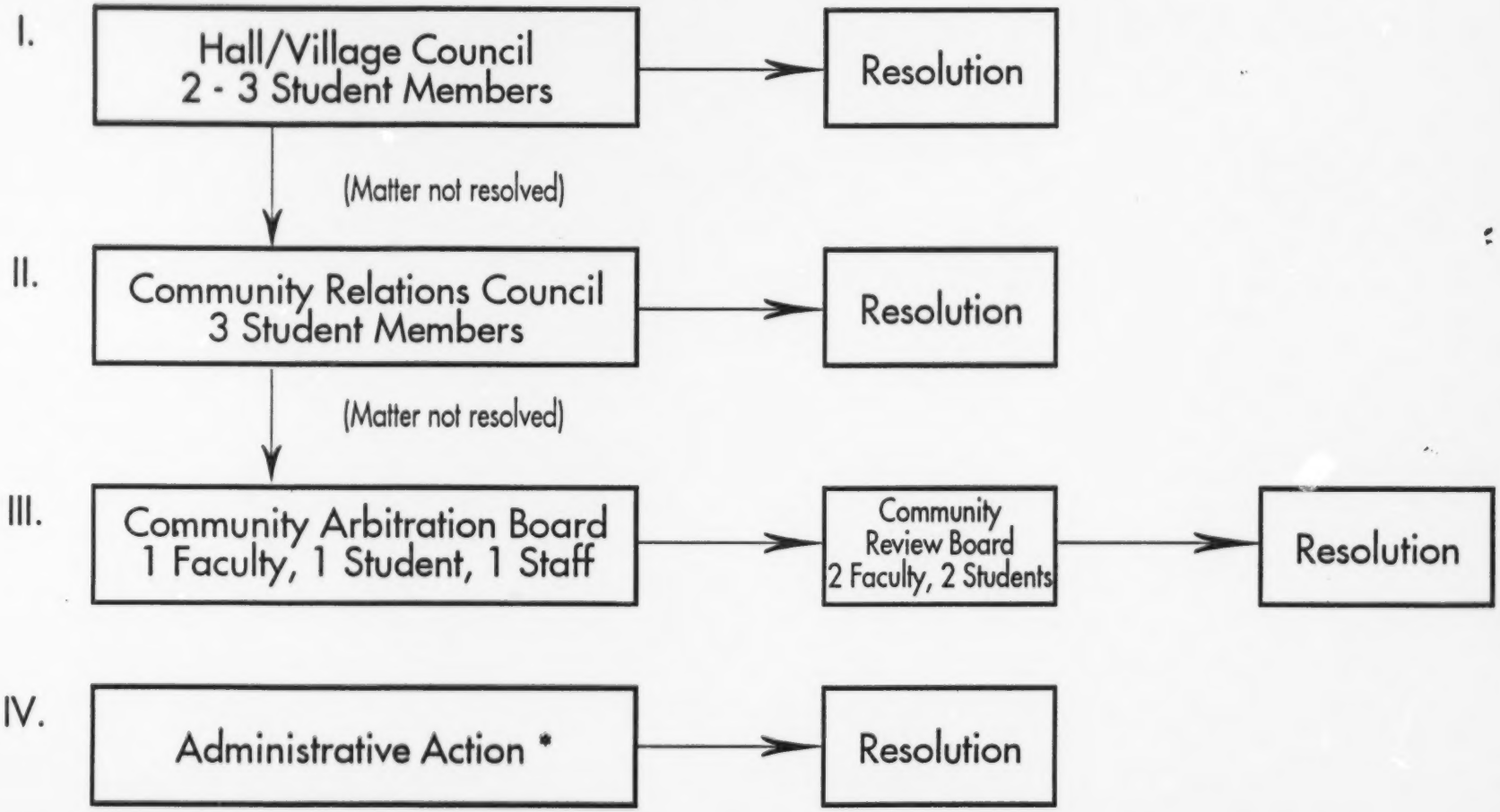
Residence Hall Council: Designed to mediate concerns in the immediate living environment, the Hall Council negotiates issues occurring among students residing in the same area. Hall Council membership consists of two students, also, from the same area trained in mediation and negotiation.

Village Council: Similar to the Hall Council, this level hears concerns occurring in the same Village living environment. Conflicts not resolved at this level are sent to the CRC to be resolved.

Administrative Action: Administrative Action is an option available to students who have acknowledged their policy violation, have accepted responsibility for their misconduct and do not chose to utilize the arbitration process. The student and a member of the Residence Life Professional Staff or the Dean of Students is then involved in a discussion regarding appropriate sanctioning.

Virginia Wesleyan College

Community Arbitration Flowchart



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VII. Hall Council Training Video

With a rough understanding of the entire Community Arbitration Process, let's look at the specifics of the Hall Council. Comprised of a two member student board, this first level attempts to mediate the concern between all parties rather than impose a binding decision. The video you are about to see was created as an educational tool used in training the student members of the Hall and Village council. It's a bit idealistic in outcome but realistic in the format of the conversations. Watch now as we join the Smithdeal/Gum Hall Council handle a typical alleged student violation that had been confronted by a Resident Assistant.

VIII. Correlations Between Boyer & Arbitration:

A Just Community

In a just community you have an environment where the sacredness of each person is honored or as Plato once said "What is practiced in a community is honored in a community." In the VWC community, particularly within the residence hall setting, the arbitration process is one vehicle that provides students the opportunity to get involved and to address such issues as roommate conflict, violations of community standards to include alcohol infractions, disruptive behavior, vandalism. The arbitration process provides an open forum for discussion, the opportunity for reaching for a common resolution, or striving to find an agreement, or understanding, by students.

The hall and village councils provide, again, the opportunity for everyone to speak or share his or her perspective. The process, as you would expect in a just community, is founded in the principles of due process and is undergirded in an atmosphere of informality (as opposed to legal protocols) where the explicit goal is problem solving through rational negotiation. To some degree, the procedure is unstructured to provide an environment conducive to effective communication where problems can be resolved in a mutually agreeable manner.

Therefore, issues of intolerance can be discussed and addressed in such ways to seek and bring about an improved campus climate and where responsible campus citizenship is valued by the majority of the campus community and where the sacredness of each person is recognized.

A Disciplined Community

A disciplined community, at its best, is guided by standards of student conduct that define acceptable (and I note that at most of our institutions, it defines unacceptable) behavior and integrate it on all dimensions of campus life. The Boyer Report suggested that ["to give overall direction to campus life, all campuses should have a clearly stated code of conduct, one that is widely disseminated and consistently enforced."]

To this end, in 1990, a group of faculty, students and staff at Virginia Wesleyan College undertook the task of editing, revising, re-arranging, clarifying or quite simply "cleaning up" our standards of student conduct. The goal was to create a user friendly document which would provide students with policies at a glance AND detailed reference information for students who wanted or needed more than a three line policy affords.

At the same time, we adopted Part One of our policy code. Part One addresses Affirmed Behaviors as compared with the traditional Part Two "Actions which constitute misconduct". Like a railroad track, our Honor Code (still in its infancy) lies parallel to the Standards of Student Conduct. Together the two documents offer guidelines for expectations of student behavior.

Student can and do affect change in policies at Virginia Wesleyan College. Besides the "typical" altered regulations such as quiet hours and

visitation, students share a voice in all conduct code policies. The 1990 editing project was a result of student concern and need for a succinct, easy to find expectations for behavior. With student involvement at every level of the arbitration process peers influence campus behavior from a personalized approach.

It is not uncommon for the student who has violated a college policy to turn to one of the Hall Council members for guidance and information. And I know of several incidents where these same Hall Council members were consulted PRIOR to a possible violation, happily I add.

If we are striving for a system which expects students to take responsibility for the decisions they make regrading their actions and behaviors, we at best, create ownership and at worst do no harm by involving students in all levels of the discipline system.

A Caring Community

Indeed, the campus community arbitration model, provides a very viable connection between learning and living. In a sense, it forces students to relate to students in their living environment, to resolve differences, and to address matters of misconduct or infractions of college policies and by means of an informal, open, and instructed procedure. This open procedure nurtures and encourages a sense of caring for one another and for one's community.

There is a feeling of connectedness where the student-based arbitration process facilitates the maintenance of a positive environment. Encouraging students how to learn and how to live together in a campus community whether it be noise levels on the hall, individual relationships, or breaches of the Standards of Student Conduct.

The composition of the councils, that is the hall council, village council, and the Community Relations Council by their make up, promote an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding. The composition is balanced, male and female, resident and commuter, students who are elected by students, students who are picked by students, or students who volunteer to serve.

The arbitration process by design, alerts the live-in professional staff, resident assistants, and at specific times, other student support services as to the individual needs of our students.

Again the key is caring -- as manifested by relationships among all members of the campus community, a trait that all student personnel professional should possess.

SUMMARY

In considering the six principles discussed in the Boyer Report and the current issues of necessary structure and freedom emphasized in the Pavela article, it is easy to understand the need for educators to help students explore the connections between being individuals and being responsible community members. As today's college administrators focus campus attention on creating Just, Disciplined and caring communities, Virginia Wesleyan's model works well in being sensitive to the "Boyer" principles by incorporating mediation, personal responsibility and a well defined governance program. This morning we have shared our student arbitration process and described the relationship between community, responsibility and discipline. We'd like to open the discussion for questions.